

THE
WAR-ELEGIES
OF
TYRTÆUS,
IMITATED.

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THE
WAR-ELEGIES
OF
TYRTÆUS,
IMITATED:

AND ADDRESSED TO THE
PEOPLE OF GREAT BRITAIN.

WITH SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE
LIFE AND POEMS OF TYRTÆUS.

By HENRY JAMES PYE.

TYRTÆUSQUE MARES ANIMOS IN MARTIA BELLA
VERSIBUS EXACUIT.

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W. A. R. E. E. G. I. E. S.

OF

T. Y. R. T. E. S.

IMITATED

PEOPLE OF GREAT BRITAIN



IN NEW YORK CITY

TO
MARQUIS TOWNSHEND,
THE FATHER AND PATRON
OF THE
MILITIA:

TO THE MILITIA, AND VOLUNTEER CORPS
OF
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND;

AND PARTICULARLY

TO THE
BERKSHIRE REGIMENT,
IN WHICH THE AUTHOR HAD THE HONOR OF
SERVING FIFTEEN YEARS,

THESE POEMS ARE DEDICATED.

MARQUIS TOWNSHIP

THE TOWN OF

1871

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THE TOWN OF

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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

LIFE and POEMS

OF

TYRTÆUS.

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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

LIFE AND POEMS OF TYRTÆUS.

THE war between Sparta and Messenia, in which Tyrtæus signalized himself, is not noticed by the elder historians of Greece. Herodotus, though he mentions many coeval events, is entirely silent on the subject. It is from Pausanias that we chiefly derive our information concerning this curious part of Grecian history; abounding beyond any other, except that of the fabulous ages, in extraordinary events. That diligent antiquary seems to have spared no pains in collecting materials to elucidate

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the subject, of which the fragments of our Poet seem to have formed no inconsiderable part.

The Lacedæmonians having suffered greatly in the war, and being much discouraged by a bold enterprize of the Messenian General Aristomenes, sent to consult the oracle at Delphi, and were directed to apply to the Athenians for a person to conduct their affairs. The Athenians were in doubt how to act; they were afraid to disobey the command of the oracle, and were yet jealous of the power the Spartans would gain if they should conquer so fine a part of Peloponnesus as Messenia. They resolved therefore to obey the oracle, but to do it in such a manner as to give no real assistance to their rivals.

Tyrtaeus

Tyrtæus, a person employed * in teaching language, esteemed of no abilities, and lame of one leg, was fixed upon to retrieve the affairs of Sparta, and certainly it was hardly possible to send a person apparently more improper for such a trust.

In regard to his abilities however, his employers were greatly mistaken. Instead of rashly attempting to exercise functions to which he was unequal, he considered how he might apply those talents he

* *Διδάσκαλος ἱεραιμάτων*. Though in the more refined ages of Greece this would have implied an instructor in general literature, I conceive the sense I have given is fully adequate to the meaning of the expression at this era. This is I think ill rendered in the Latin by *Ludimagister*, and in English by *School-master*, as a person then entrusted with the general education of youth, must have been skilled in the gymnastic and military exercises, and not have been so obviously unfit for the service he was appointed to, as Pausanias insinuates the Athenians supposed Tyrtæus to be.

possessed to the best advantage. He began by singing Odes and Elegies, calculated to elevate their depressed spirits, both to the nobles and the people; a measure however contrary to our conceptions at present, perfectly consonant with the manners of the times, when poetry was almost the sole vehicle of instruction of every kind.

At this time the Messenian army, augmented by a number of auxiliary forces, marched against the Spartans. In the battle, Tyrtæus did not aspire to any command, but keeping in the rear among the priests, encouraged the soldiers to perform their duty by reciting † his heroic poems. His exhorta-

† The reader must not transfer his idea of the extended space, and tremendous noise of a modern battle, to a Grecian army marching

“In perfect phalanx to the Dorian mood
Of pipes and soft recorders.”

tions

tions however were unsuccessful, and the Lacedæmonians suffered so complete an overthrow, that they determined to solicit for peace on any terms.

It was now that the Muse of Tyrtæus exerted herself to advantage. He so reanimated their drooping courage by his martial lays, that it was determined to prosecute the war with the utmost vigour, which, after a violent struggle, terminated in the total expulsion of the Messenians from Greece, who migrating into Sicily, established a colony and gave it the name of their former territory, which, with the trifling change by the Latin orthography into Messina, it still retains, and was a few years ago the scene of one of the most horrid convulsions of nature, that modern times have experienced.

We

We hear afterwards of an insurrection, which had taken place at Sparta on account of a scarcity of bread, being appeased by Tyrtæus.

After this he is no further noticed by Pausanias. But we are told by Lycurgus the Orator, that his memory was held in the greatest veneration by the Lacedæmonians, and that his elegies were in such esteem that at the commencement of every warlike expedition, they were ordered to be recited before the king's tent. To this may be added the honourable testimony, recorded by Plutarch, which Leonidas the hero of Thermopylæ bore to his merit, esteeming him a poet excellent in exciting the minds of young men, inspiring them by his poems with ardour in battle, a love of military glory, and a contempt of their own safety.

There

There is something extraordinary in this account. But ages of barbarism are ages of enthusiasm, and we must by no means esteem every thing that is now improbable, to have been impossible under very different circumstances of manners and polity. The story of Joan of Arc is to the full as wonderful, and for the effect of popular verses on the public, we can adduce many instances from modern times. Burnet particularly notices the effect the ballad of Lilliburlero had on the army of King William: and we have seen in our own time the power of *Ca ira*, and the *Marsellois* hymn in exciting French enthusiasm.

A very learned and elegant critic makes the following observation on these elegies. " We have
 " still (he says) some remains of that Tyrtæus

—— " Who

——“ Who by his manly strain

“ Urged the brave warrior to the martial plain.”

“ All replete with warlike courage, with patriot-

“ ism, with the immortal glory of those men who

“ fell bravely fighting in the field, which might even

“ inspire a coward with valour. By these exhorta-

“ tions he elevated the minds of the Lacedæmo-

“ nians, a long time depressed and dispirited, to the

“ certain hope of victory. The fact is well known,

“ and celebrated by the testimony of many authors,

“ without which it might possibly appear fabulous

“ to many, but to me it does not seem more strongly

“ proved by the faith of history, than the reason of

“ the thing itself. Is it not highly credible that

“ those men should fight with the greatest ardor of

“ mind, with the most firm and pertinacious cou-

“ rage, who when formed in order of battle, when

“ advancing,

“advancing, when on the point of engaging the
“enemy, were perpetually finging such verses as
“these to the flute?”* He then quotes several of
the most spirited parts of the elegies.

If I were to hazard a conjecture as to the particular occasions on which we may suppose Tyrtæus to have recited these elegies that remain to us, following the account of Pausanias, I should arrange them thus. I should suppose the Second elegy to be one of those first recited to the senate and the people; the First to have been sung as the army marched up to the unsuccessful battle; the Third to have been employed to encourage them after the defeat, and the Fourth, possibly, just before the battle in which they were victorious. The striking resemblance of

* Lowth on the Poetry of the Hebrews.

this last elegy to what might be said to the people of this country in allusion to the French Emigrants, first induced me to think of the imitation of a poet whose elegies seem so peculiarly applicable to our situation at present, threatened as we are with the vengeance of a powerful and implacable enemy. Whatever his opinion may be of the origin of the war, there can be no real friend to his country who does not wish for peace. But no peace that would not deprive us of our existence as an independent state, that would not subject us to all the horrors of Gallic tyranny, or, to use yet a more dreadful word, Gallic fraternity, can be obtained, without the most vigorous exertion of all our resources, to shew our ability to prosecute the war with resolution and effect.

It is remarkable that all the consolation and reward that Tyrtæus holds out to the patriotic youths
whom

whom he encourages to fall in battle, are a public funeral, and to have their names immortalized in the memory of their grateful country. There is not the slightest hint of a future state of existence in which they may mingle with heroes and demigods, and be conscious of the honours paid to their ashes. And this remarkable line in the first elegy,

Ἐὶ δὲ φύγοι μὲν κῆρα τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο.

“ And if he ‘scape the long long sleep of death,”

places the gloomy idea of death, and the happiness of escaping it in so strong a light, as must have greatly counteracted the preceding heroic exhortations. Homer, from whom indeed this line is almost verbally copied, gives also a most unfavorable account
of

of the state of the dead, and makes the ghost of Achilles say to Ulysses, §

‘ Rather I chuse laboriously to bear
 ‘ A weight of woes, and breathe the vital air,
 ‘ A slave to some poor swain that toils for bread
 ‘ Than reign the sceptred monarch of the dead.’

POPE, *Odyssey* xi.

Very different from this were the motives by which the northern nations were animated to warlike

§ In the celebrated Athenian Scolion, on Harmodius, and Aristogeiton, a future state is strongly held out.

Belov’d Harmodius! Death in vain.

O’er thee usurp’d a transient reign;

Those happy isles thy footsteps tread

Where amaranthine flowers are shed

On Peleus’ son, and Diomed.

energy.

energy. . They expected the most perfect happiness, according to their gross ideas of enjoyment, as the immediate reward of all who fell in battle. The effect of this is well described by Lucan :

—Umbrae

Non tacitas Erebi sedes, Ditisque profundi
Pallida regna petunt; regit idem spiritus artus
Orbe alio, longæ (canitis si cognita,) vitæ.
Mors media est; certe populi quos despicit Arctos
Felices errore suo quos ille timorum
Maximus haud urget leti metus, unde ruendi
In ferrum mens prona viris, animæque rapaces
Mortis, et ignavum redituræ parcere vitæ.

Pharsalia, L. I.

‘ If dying mortals dooms they find aright
‘ No ghosts descend to dwell in dreadful night,

- No parting souls to grisly Pluto go,
- Nor seek the dreary silent shades below ;
- But forth they fly, immortal in their kind,
- And other bodies in new worlds they find :
- Thus life for ever runs its endless race,
- And like a line death but divides the space,
- A stop which can but for a moment last,
- A point between the future and the past.
- Thrice happy they beneath the northern skies
- Who that worst fear, the fear of death despise ;
- Hence they no care for this frail being feel ;
- But rush undaunted on the pointed steel ;
- Provoke approaching fate, and bravely scorn
- To spare that life which must so soon return.

ROWE.

The contrast between the Classic and Northern
Mythology, in this respect, is admirably exhibited
in

in that noble Lyric Poem, the Ode to Death, in Mr. Mason's *Caractacus*.

The disheartening idea of disembodied spirits being in a state of shadowy existence, inferior in dignity and enjoyment to their situation when alive, is found throughout the poems ascribed to Ossian; a circumstance, I should think, almost of itself sufficient to shew they are not the genuine effusions of a Celtic bard.

The chief deviation of these elegies from the original, consists in the application of the exhortations to my own countrymen, and, especially in the conclusion of the third elegy, in adapting the instructions that Tyrtæus gives to the different troops of the Grecian army, to those that compose our own. The English reader, who wishes to see how far this

has

has led me from the letter of the Athenian poet,
may have complete satisfaction by consulting the
very faithful, and yet poetical translation by Mr.
Polwhele.

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THE
WAR-ELEGIES
OF
TYRTÆUS, IMITATED.

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THE
WARFIELD

TYRTAUS LIMITED

ELEGY I.

* **N**O T mine to fing the racer's rapid flight,
Or the athletic wrestler's finewy force,
Not tho' his limbs are strung with giant might,
His active steps outstrip the whirlwind's course;

* The king of Prussia seems to have had this in his mind, in the following passage of his Poem on the Art of War, though he applies to the prudent general, what Tyrtæus says of the daring foldier.

En vain possédez vous la force d'un athlète,
Qui dans Londres combat au bruit de la trompette :
Quand vous ressembleriez à ces fils de la terre,
A ces rivaux des dieux, qui leur firent la guerre,
Qui pour braver l'Olympe en leur rebellion
Souleverent l'Osse sur le mont Pelion ;
Quand du dieu des combats vous auriez le courage
Ne vous attendez point à gagner mon suffrage.
Taille, force valeur, tout est insuffisant,
Minerve exige plus du général prudent.

Her richest boons tho' lavish fortune shower,

His form tho' faultless, tho' divine his face,

Tho' deck'd in all the pride of regal power,

Tho' eloquence his every accent grace.

Not all the gifts of glory and of fame,

All genius, and all industry can yield,

If the firm bosom feel not valor's flame,

Can form the hero of the martial field.

If while he sees pale slaughter stalk around

And stain with purple gore the dewy plain,

He shrink inglorious from the threaten'd wound,

Nor in the radiant van of war remain.

This is true glory—this the noblest pride,

The brightest trophy blooming youth can wear;

This real merit in a people's eyes,

Before the rest the battle's rage to dare.

Disdaining

Disdaining even the thought of flight or fear,

His life, his soul, by steady valor steel'd,

He calls to glorious death the lagging rear ;

Such is the hero of the martial field.

Now rushing on th' embattled foe amain

He turns his scatter'd ranks to shameful flight,

Now throws his eagle eye across the plain,

Guides the loud storm, and rules the waves of fight.

If in the battle's front he presses the ground,

His friends, his parents, and his country's pride,

His manly bosom pierced with many a wound,

His snowy vest with purple glory dyed,

The mingled tear of youth and age is shed,

His funeral rites assembled senates grace,

The trophied banner o'er his tomb is spread,

And fame eternal waits his honor'd race.

Ne'er

Ne'er shall his glory fade, his name be lost,
(Tho' dead, his worth, his mem'ry, ne'er shall die,)
Who falls contending with the adverse host
For every public, every social tie.

But should he 'scape the long long sleep of death
What grateful crowds the godlike victor hail,
What strains of conquest sung with rapt'rous breath,
What shouts triumphant float on ev'ry gale.

Him every age and rank, alike revere,
Around his brows perennial laurels bloom,
'Till blest with ease thro' many a rolling year
He sink in silence to the peaceful tomb.

To guard, to grace the veteran, all contend,
Where e'er he goes his presence reverence draws,
To him warm youth, and firmer manhood bend,
And even the hoary senior bows applause.

Such

Such is the fame that crowns th' heroic deed,

Such the reward of those who nobly dare;

Then snatch from glory's hand th' immortal meed,

Nor linger in the manly toil of war.

Ne'er shall his glory fade, his name be lost,
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APPENDIX

Such is the fame that crowns the heroic deed,
Such the reward of those who nobly dare;
Then lo! the glory's hand the immortal meed,
Nor finger in the many roll of war.

ELEGY II.

How long in sloth's inglorious fetters bound
 Slumber the brave?—The soft enchantment break.
 Britons to arms!—The taunting nations round
 Call forth th' ingenuous blush on manhood's cheek.

Calmly ye sit as in the lap of peace,
 Tho' loud the din of battle round you roars,
 Tho' threat'ning storms on every side encrease,
 And the proud Gaul insults your wave-worn shores.

Shake

Shake off this torpid gloom—arouse, for shame,
And loose your fury on the barbarous foe;
Full in the radiant front of battle flame,
And even in death the bolt of vengeance throw.

For country, parents, children, blooming wife,
Let the young hero meet the foe elate,
Not fondly anxious for a fleeting life
Fore-doom'd th' inevitable prey of fate.

Grasp the bright sword, and rush to join the fight,
Since none can 'scape th' impartial stroke of death;
Oft from the field the recreant wings his flight
*To yield on beds of down his coward breath.

* 'Tis strange he hides him in fresh cups, soft beds,
' Sweet words, or hath more ministers than we
' Who draw his knives i' the war.'

Cymbeline.

To

To him a tear his country never gave,

No general grief marks his unhallow'd tomb;

While bending pensive o'er the warrior's grave

A forrowing nation mourns his timeless doom.

His memory, when dead, by all deplor'd,

His country's guardian, and his kindred's boast:

When living, as a demi-god ador'd,

His breast a fortress, and his arm an host.

THE OVEN

The oven was his dwelling place
The General first makes his mansion
The oven is the place of his
The oven is the place of his
The oven is the place of his
The oven is the place of his
The oven is the place of his
The oven is the place of his

ELEGY III.

BUT ye are Britons—are the sons of those,
 Of that unconquer'd race, whose arms of yore,
 In many a conflict from superior foes
 The bloody wreaths of crimson conquest tore.

Think on the trophies Creci, Poitiers, gave,
 Remember Agincourt's illustrious plain;
 Remember Blenheim's field, when Danube's wave
 Pour'd a red deluge to th' affrighted main.

Heaven frowns not on our cause—and shall the boast
Of impious myriads shake a Briton's soul?—
Rush to the field, and on yon savage host
The awful tempest of the battle roll.

By vengeance stung, and prodigal of life
Advance, nor fear death's universal doom;
Fame's guerdon theirs who fall amid the strife,
The fun of endless glory gilds their tomb.

You well have prov'd each dread extreme of war,
Have felt the ruthless god's terrific ire,
When you have chaced the timid foe afar,
Or* 'measur'd back your ground in faint retire.'

Ye know how few of those who bravely stand
A living bulwark to the croud behind,
And face with dauntless breasts the adverse band,
Have e'er in honor's field their breath resign'd.

* *King John.*

But words are weak to paint the foul disgrace,

* The scenes of horrid carnage that await

The trembling steps of that unmanly race

Who fly inglorious from the field of fate.

Nor fall they by the brave,—the dastard train

Who fear to meet the thunder of the fight,

Pursue incessant o'er th' ensanguin'd plain

Their weaker foes, and stop their breathless flight.

Ne'er o'er his tomb shall fame her trophy rear,

To him no choral strain the Pæan sounds,

Who sinks beneath the following coward's spear,

His back unseemly gash'd with shameful wounds.

* Horace has imitated this, and what follows ;

Dulce et decorum est pro patriâ mori,

Mors et fugacem persequitur virum.

Nec parcat imbellis juventæ

Poplitibus timidoque tergo.

Advance

Advance brave youths, a close compacted band,
 To check the adverse battle's furious tide;
 Now foot to foot in firm-wedged phalanx stand,
 * Now set the teeth, and stretch the nostrils wide.

March boldly on to meet th'impetuous Gaul,
 Pierce with resistless steel his threatening line:
 Trust not inglorious to the distant ball,
 Bid in his eyes the gleamy bayonet shine.

The white plume nodding o'er the helmed crest
 Pour on his squadrons like a wintry flood,
 And shocking, horse to horse and breast to breast,
 Dye each avenging sword in hostile blood.

* K. Henry V.

Χεῖλος ὀδῶσι δάκρυον.

'Tis

'Tis yours ye light arm'd foot, a scatter'd band,

On every side the harrafs'd foe to tire,

Aim the destructive tube with skilful hand,

And thin his ranks by well directed fire.

THE CITY

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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ELEGY IV.

ON him shall fame, shall endless glory wait,
 Him future ages crown with just applause,
 Who boldly daring in the field of fate
 Falls a pure victim in his country's cause.

Ah! view yon hapless fugitives who leave
 Their seats paternal, and their native sky,
 And the full breast in silent sorrow heave
 Beneath the galling load of penury.

O'er

O'er distant realms who wretched exiles roam,
Perhaps an aged parent's footsteps guide,
Far from their social hearths, and much-loved home,
To meet the taunt of scorn, the frown of pride.

Who wander friendless on a foreign shore,
From foreign hands who ask precarious life,
And prostrate see at Avarice' iron door,
A helpless offspring and a weeping wife.

Thro' hostile regions as they sorrowing go,
Tho' pity's bounteous hand afford relief,
In the moist eyelid of the generous foe
Contempt is mingled with the tear of grief.

Far be from us such shame—No! We can die,
Can perish bravely in the glorious strife,
Or guard this hallow'd seat of liberty,
Guard every social charity of life.

Arm youthful warriors ! arm ! in Britain's right,

Advance, a martial, and a patriot band,

Disdaining pallid fear and shameful flight,

Point the long lance, and lift the shining brand.

Spring ardent to the front, and court the fray,

Nor let the veteran warrior worn with age

Full in the vaward of the bright array

Provoke the war and sink beneath its rage.

The fight unfitting, ill becomes the plain

When bath'd in blood and seam'd with many a wound,

Vent'rous advanced before the youthful train

The venerable fathers press the ground.

But in life's blooming spring the warrior's form

Still charms, tho' fate untimely steal the breath,

Like flowers uprooted by the vernal storm,

In ruin sweet, and beautiful even in death.

While friendship gives the precious balm of praise,
 Beauty shall pour her still more precious tear,
 A people's voice the hymn of triumph raise,
 A people's sorrows sanctify his bier.



T H E E N D .